Hidden

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/7507918.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, Jack Crawford
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe, Alternate Universe - College/University, Possessive Hannibal, Manipulative Hannibal, POV Hannibal
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Evolution
Collections:	mrdrhsbnds
Stats:	Published: 2016-07-17 Words: 7,606 Chapters: 7/7

Hidden

by Creed Cascade (creedcascade)

Summary

Will Graham never graduated high school and now that his father is dead, he has nothing. Jack Crawford got Will a dead end job working at the university as a night janitor. Will likes to sneak into to listen to the lectures of Dr. Hannibal Lecter, who definately notices he is there.

Chapter 1

Hannibal enjoyed morning classes for the simple reason his students were at their most vulnerable. Sleepy-eyed and high on caffeine. It made their fear more palatable. He could smell it.

Teaching undergraduates was never fun. It was barely tolerable, but at least he could have play games to amuse himself and pass the time. He asked questions that made them think and the panicked expressions on the faces as he calls on them is amusing. He found their attempts to "dress up" to illicit his favour amusing and yet, insulting. Most of them wouldn't know an iron if it hit them in the face.

Very rarely did he cross paths with someone worthy of his actual, bonafide attention. He knew all of their names after the first day... those who didn't voluntarily withdraw, that is. It helped that his class was a pre-requisite to graduate with a honours degree. In his class he asked questions and expected immediate, correct and intelligent answers. The wrong answer would elicit a raised eyebrow or a pointed look. Never rude, but even worse. To illicit disappointment in Dr. Hannibal Lecter was enough to make many undergrads weep or send them into a panic attack. This was an advanced fourth year lecture and Hannibal knew every name to go with a petrified face, but one eluded him.

A scruffy young man who hid in the back of the room, huddled in one of the uncomfortable plastic chairs. Too-long hair with curls askew and face unshaven. Dark circles under his eyes showed he didn't sleep enough and his gaunt frame betrayed he didn't eat properly. His clothing was wrinkled and stained. He hid behind too-big glasses that were broken and taped at the side. Unkempt. Not the kind of student that attended the Ivy League university. He never spoke and wore ear buds running the cord down into his pocket. But, Hannibal knew the ear phones were broken, having seen another student discard them and this young man retrieve them from the trash. He didn't have a phone. He used them as means to keep from talking to others. A pretence to hide, just like the glasses. A defence mechanism.

And yet Hannibal knew the young man was listening to every word of his lecture even though he didn't make eye contact. He was taking it all in, even though he wasn't taking notes. Hannibal carefully monitored his facial expressions through out the lecture. The young man was listening intently, his brow drawn together in concentration.

He was... out of place and, therefore, intriguing. Hannibal wanted to talk with him, but he came in just as class was starting... rude. And, left just as the lecture was wrapping up... even more rude.

Hannibal would find out who he was and why he was there.

HHHHHH

A knock on Hannibal's door drew his attention.

"Hannibal, I heard you wanted to see me."

"Ah, Jack, always a pleasure to see you. Please, have a seat," Hannibal said, glancing up from the journal article he was reviewing. "Thank you for coming. I was going drop by after my office hours."

"I was just coming back from the photocopy room and your office was on the way." Jack sat in the wooden chair opposite Hannibal's desk.

"You're the Department Head, you shouldn't-"

"Only because you didn't want the job," Jack snorted. "Stop with the pretence, Hannibal. We're colleagues and I like to think friends. What can I do for you?"

Hannibal inclined his head in a slight nod. "I prefer my research over bureaucracy. Your sense of academic duty is commendable."

"You can't be bothered with the paperwork, you mean? And, it's not like you need the pay raise." Jack's short, booming laugh filled the office. "Lucky me. To each their own."

"Indeed. I have a question about someone in my morning class."

"Did another one of your students have a nervous break down?" Jack sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "You've really gotta stop chewing them up and spitting them out. It's bad for our stats."

"Students who-"

"Hannibal, what do you want?" Jack cut him off. "I've got another meeting in ten minutes."

"Certainly. My apologies. There is young man who sits at the back of my classroom. Longish, curly hair, blue eyes and glasses-"

"Will," Jack said. "What has he done?"

"Nothing untoward. This... Will, is not on my roster and I received no memo that he was auditing my class. You obviously know him."

"Will is the son of an old family friend of mine. He's not a student." Jack's posture had straightened, betraying he was uncomfortable. "If he's making a nuisance of himself, I'll tell him to stay away."

"He isn't."

"Good. Good," Jack said and coughed. "Will Graham. Will is an acquired taste. He is... different. His social skills are lacking, but he's harmless despite his sharp tongue. I know your feelings on manners."

"Is he on the spectrum?" Hannibal asked. Pieces of the puzzle were starting to fall into place.

"Most likely, amongst other things. He's a smart kid."

"I sense a but."

"But, he didn't graduate high school. His dad died and he has no family. He's too prideful to accept my help even though he doesn't even have a pot to piss in."

"Please, don't be crude, Jack."

"Sorry, sorry... I got him a job on campus. He's a janitor on the night shift. I'll have a talk with him and tell him to keep away from your class."

"Please, don't," Hannibal said. "He's not disturbing the class. But, my lecture is honours-"

"I said he was smart. Like, scary smart. Genius level, if I could hazard a guess, but he hasn't let himself be tested since he hit puberty."

Hannibal's fingers strummed a rhythm on his mahogany desk. "He's hungry for knowledge."

"Yes." Jack nodded. "He lurks in all sort of classes across campus. I said it was okay, if he was low key. You're the only one who's complained thus far."

"Not a complaint, merely an inquiry."

"Please, as a personal favour to me, let him be, Hannibal. He's a troubled young man, but he's had a tough life. This is the most settled he's been in years. He keeps to himself, does a good job... he's not a people-person, but he's a hard worker. If his mind is distracted, he's more... well, less..." Jack sighed deeply and his shoulders slumped. "It's a damn shame. He has so much potential."

"Very well, he can stay. How could I refuse such a plea?"

"Thank you, Hannibal."

Hannibal had every intention about learning more about this Will Graham.

Chapter 2

Will Graham was easy enough to find and follow. Hidden in plain sight. His attempts to "blend in" to the crowd made him stick out even more in the crowd to Hannibal - baseball cap trying to hide his wild hair, ear buds in place and glasses on as a social shield.

It was easy to follow him to the dumpsters outside of the building housing student food services. At end of each day staff disposed of the food that was past it's expiry date. Despite the university's policy to compost such food, a staff member carefully placed containers filled with expired sandwiches inside the dumpster. An act of kindness undoubtedly because soon Will swooped in and scooped up the sandwiches, putting them into a ratty backpack. Hannibal's stomach protested on mere principle.

The boy had obviously experienced poverty. He knew how to dumpster dive to survive. The question remained why he was doing so now despite earning a pay cheque.

Hannibal followed the boy to the university library and Will skulked into a back entrance, proceeding to the fourth floor. Hannibal found him alone, set-up in a seldom used area of musty tomes. He had a stack of books in front of him, with one open before him.

"I know you're there," Will called out . "I know you've been following me."

Hannibal stepped out from behind the shelves. "How very astute of you."

One of the food containers was open, with a big bite taken out of a sad, stale sandwich. The meat was greyish and smelt foul. Will must be desperate, or lacking taste buds, to eat it.

"I didn't steal it," Will snapped.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "You didn't pay for it, either."

Will's shoulders slumped minimally. A sore point to his pride undoubtedly.

"What's it to you?" Will asked. "Are you going to report me?"

"Does Dr. Crawford know?"

"That wasn't an answer, Dr. Lecter."

"Indeed."

Cheeky boy. Will flicked his gaze up, but not to Hannibal's face. His suit. The boy was taking in his suit - a splendid checkered three-piece. A slight blush rose to Will's cheeks.

"Don't tell Jack..." Will said and then through gritted teeth added, "Please."

"And, here I was under the impression you lacked manners."

"I've watched your class."

"Pardon?"

"Your class." Will waved his hand absently in the air. "You despise bad manners and rude people."

"You're only using politeness to get something you want. That's telling."

"Stop psychoanalyzing me," Will snapped. "I don't like it."

"I will stop psychoanalyzing you, if you continue to mind your manners."

"If you're not going to report me, then leave me alone. I won't come by your class anymore." Will poked the half eaten sandwich with a finger.

"The books-"

"I'm allowed," Will said, snappish and defensive. "I have a support staff card. I'm allowed to read university library materials and check them out."

"Of course, but if you'll be attending my class, I expect you to keep up with the readings."

Will stopped poking the sandwich. "You'll let me keep coming? What's the catch?

"Keeping up with the reading and other certain conditions."

"I already read everything."

"That's highly doubtful, Mr. Graham."

"Every. Word. I found your syllabus online. Chapter five of your last book was pretentious, even by your standards."

The boy had read it because that was the truth and yet no one else had ever caught it. He was annoyingly insightful and intriguing at the same time.

"Then you must prove it and participate in class discussions."

Will paled. "No."

"Discussion, answering questions and defending your opinion is fundamental in asserting if you understand the theoretical components."

"No," Will insisted, but his tone was quiet and uncertain. He clearly want to attend the class but was petrified of public speaking. "I really did read it all. Your chapter five, what I meant was... it seemed more rushed than your usual work, but you hid it with jargon."

"My editor moved up the deadline," Hannibal admitted. "It was somewhat rushed."

"I really did read it all," Will mumbled. He fumbled with his glasses and bent down his head. "I don't usually like the soft sciences, but your class... it's interesting. How you mix science, theory, history, and the arts... I've never seen anyone else do that."

"I'll forgive you for using the term 'soft sciences', Mr. Graham. And, I have been told my theoretical perspective is unique."

"You're a doctor doctor," Will said with a slight smirk. "I read your bio."

"A medical doctor with a Ph.D.," Hannibal corrected. "It's not unheard of."

"Please, I want to attend your lectures, but I just can't talk in class." Will hazarded to glance up and this time made eye contact. "Please, Doctor Lecter."

For a brief moment he was enamoured with blue eyes. A gaze that was much wiser than his young years. And, something else. Veiled darkness.

Like recognized like. Feralness.

Will gasped in a sharp breath.

Will saw a glimpse of the real Hannibal in that moment. More than anyone had seen and lived to tell in a very long time. Will licked his lips and blinked, his mind adrift.

Anyone with any sense of self-preservation would distance themselves after seeing even a crack of his person suit, but Will's pupils were dilated and his breath quickening.

"William," Hannibal said, low and gruff.

Will blinked rapidly. The recognition was gone. "Will. I prefer Will. I'm s-sorry. I blacked out, didn't I?"

"Yes."

Very interesting.

"Was I gone long?"

"Only moments," Hannibal told him.

"Sorry, I do that sometimes." The blush was back.

"I would like to suggest an alternative to participating in class, Will. You may still attend the lectures, but I must insist on discussing the readings with you. You may do so after my office hours, before you start the evening shift. We will start tomorrow evening."

Will bit his bottom lip, working the skin between his lip. Hannibal decided to test a theory.

"Would you like more readings since you've read all those listed on my syllabus?" Hannibal asked. "Something more challenging?"

"Y-Yes," Will whispered. "Yes, please."

"That's settled then, Mr. Graham. You will attend my lecture tomorrow morning and I will see you in my office at 7:30 p.m. promptly. Don't be late."

Chapter 3

7:29 p.m.

"Please, come in, Mr. Graham," Hannibal called out. "You're punctual, which is a small favour in your benefit."

The door creaked as it was slowly pushed open. Will shuffled in, with slumped shoulders and downcast gaze. He was wearing his janitorial overalls. They were in stark contrast to Hannibal's expensive suit and Will felt it innately.

"How did you know it was me?" he asked.

Unlike most of the other on campus, Will had not showered in days. His natural scent was not masked by artificial means. Not even deodorant. He smelt delicious.

"I could smell you."

Will winced. "I'm sorry."

"It was not meant as an insult, Will. I have heightened senses, especially smell. Therefore, I smell everyone. You are refreshingly you. Please, have a seat."

Hannibal had chosen to set-up in his sitting area, in front of his desk. He was sitting in a modern, black leather chair, placed strategically in the room in front of a sleek coffee table.

Will sat opposite to him. "I wanted to apologize."

Hannibal unbuttoned his top jacket button and sat back. "For what?"

"For being me."

"Self-deprecation doesn't suit you, Mr. Graham."

Will shook his head. "Just Will."

"Well, then, Just Will. Thank you for coming this evening. There is no need to apologize. I find you... curious, but that is not a judgement," Hannibal said. "If you don't mind, would you excuse me if I ate while we talked?"

"Yeah, of course." Will's knee bounced up and down. A nervous habit. He chewed at the cuticles of his right thumb. Another nervous habit Hannibal would have to cure him of. Anxiety induced. Hannibal made the young man oh so nervous and yet he came. Will had a keen sense of survival instincts, but was ignoring them.

Hannibal inclined his head in a polite nod and reached for his thermal containers. He set one in front of himself as the other in front of Will.

"I made enough for two," Hannibal said and with a flourish undid the lids. The steam rose off and delicious scents filled the air. "It would be rude of me not to feed a guest and very rude of said guest not to partake in my offering. You make lack social graces, Will, but I know you aren't inherently rude."

"You pity me," Will said, shifting to sit up. "This was a mistake."

Hannibal's hand shot out and seized Will's thigh, digging in his fingertips. "Sit down, William."

Will sat back down so hard the chair legs scrapped on the floor. He blinked slowly and his breath hitched. His pupils dilated. Hannibal's thumb rubbed in small circles for just a moment. He removed his hand to settle two fingers under Will's chin, forcing him to look up.

"I neither pity nor judge you," Hannibal said, his tone low and controlled. Calming. Possessive.

Will looked at him. Really looked at him and didn't flinch. He blinked and licked his lips. Hannibal ran his thumb over Will's bottom lip.

"You are a curious thing," Hannibal whispered.

Will shuddered, but didn't pull away. Hannibal's mind quickly diagnosed. The boy was touch starved. He might have problems with authority, but responded at a base level to an older, strong male figure. Obviously issues with his father. No apparent maternal influence.

"Listen very carefully, William. We are going to share a meal and conversation." Hannibal brushed the back of his knuckles along Will's cheek, then pulled away. "Do you understand?"

Will nodded, his head minutely following Hannibal's hand before he caught the needy action. His gaze followed Hannibal's hand.

"Excellent." Hannibal rewarded him with a smile. "Have you ever read the works of Niccol Machiavelli?"

Will blinked and licked his bottom lip. "Yes, sir. Excerpts."

"We shall begin with 'The Prince'. You will need to read the entirety of this treatise for the correct context."

How fitting. The Prince was fitting for this young man with so much potential. His Prince. Young enough to be shaped and guided. A yet to be broken teacup. Hannibal was nearly dizzy thinking of the could-be's.

"I... yes, of course," Will said. "The translation, or in the original text?"

Hannibal's mouth went a little dry. "You know languages other than English?"

"Mostly. I wouldn't say I'm fluent, but I can understand Spanish, Portuguese, French, and I've picked up some Latin since starting your class."

"You don't like people to know though. Do you? That way you can fly under their radar."

"They think I'm stupid, but I can understand what they're saying... what they're saying about me."

"You learned from the women who used to watch you while your father was away?"

"Yes," Will said and nodded. "We moved a lot. He'd pay some women in the hotels we were staying at to watch me. They rarely spoke English."

Will was willing to learning another language if Hannibal wanted him, too. Hannibal mind whirred. He was going to teach Will Latin.

"What a clever boy you are," Hannibal praised. "We shall start with the translation, but I think reading it in its original text will benefit you."

The sound of Will's stomach growling caught Hannibal's attention. There was a good chance Will hadn't eaten since he ate the dumpster sandwich. He was glancing at the food and up at Hannibal, looking for permission to eat, but still wary.

"Oeufs en Cocotte," Hannibal said and nudged the container towards Will. "Please, eat."

Will's brows drew together. Mind whirring and translating. "Baked... eggs?"

Protein selected careful to help nourish a starving young man. Simple, but tasteful.

"Yes, good. Now eat," Hannibal instructed.

Will reached for the fork, but looked up once more. Old habits. Wary that it would be taken away. Hannibal carefully took the fork and broke off a piece of the baked eggs. He held it up in front of Will's lips.

Will slowly opened his lips and reached out to take the offering into his mouth. He held Hannibal's gaze the entire time. Offering accepted. As he chewed, Will gave a soft moan and his eyelids closed in a moment of rapture. Bliss born of starvation.

Oh but Hannibal will adore feeding him and cooking for him. Instructing him and opening Will's eyes to the world... to the possibilities. Feeding his appetites in many ways. His mind. His body. His darkness.

"I want more," Will said. "Please, Doctor Lecter."

Layers upon layers. A plea.

Hannibal smiled and fed the boy... his boy, another morsel.

"This is only the beginning," Hannibal promised.

Chapter 4

Will's mind was beautifully dark. His logic was unlike anyone else Hannibal had ever encountered. It was simply enrapturing. He didn't blindly agree with Hannibal, which Hannibal respected. He argued his own perspective and interpretation of the readings with sincerity and fire.

Hannibal was also greatly enamoured with Will's appetite. He devoured the egg dish with relish and appreciation. When Hannibal produced freshly baked bread and herb butter, Will's expression was shocked but yearning. If such simple dishes could illicit pure joy, then Hannibal couldn't wait to cook more elaborate dishes for him. Hannibal was already planning to transform Will's palette into something sophisticated.

Will showed up to Hannibal's morning class after his night shift. He was clearly exhausted, but he still listened intently to Hannibal's lecture. Hannibal may have put more flourish and zeal into his lecture than normal, knowing their was an appreciative audience. The undergrads were more petrified than usual.

Shortly before the lecture was done, Will left, as was his habit. But, this time he lingered at the door and Hannibal held his gaze. The corner of Will's mouth twitched up in a half-smile and he did a half now. Hannibal added playful to the list.

Will's trail was easy enough to pick up as Hannibal followed. Will walked several miles off campus, to a seldom used back alley. When Hannibal found him, Will was sleeping in the back seat of an abandoned vehicle, curled protectively around a scruffy dog. There were empty sandwich containers scattered on the floor mat. A meal Hannibal knew Will undoubtedly shared with the dog. Animals provided unconditional love. Will apparently had the habit of picking up strays.

Will would never know he was here, but the situation was unacceptable. It was time he had a chat with Jack.

HHHHHH

"Good afternoon, Jack."

Jack looked up from the grad papers he was grading and scowled when Hannibal entered the Department Head's office.

"Oh, hell. I know that look. You might as well close the door if it's going to be one of those conversations. Will I need more coffee?" Jack sighed. "What happened?"

Hannibal closed the door and sat down opposite of Jack's desk. He steepled his fingers. "Will Graham."

"I should have gotten more coffee. Do I need something stronger? What did he do?"

"Why do you presume he did anything, Jack?"

"I don't have to presume anything. I know him."

"Can you please explain to me how a young man of his caliber ended up in his current predicament?"

"And what predicament is that exactly? I should have gotten something stronger," Jack said. His glare might have phased someone else, but it had no effect on Hannibal. If anything, it made Hannibal more resolved.

"I concur with your assessment that he is a genius. I am certain he also possesses an eidetic memory and an assortment of other-"

"We could write a textbook about his issues," Jack snapped.

"You said you were a family friend." Hannibal levelled his own steady gaze on Jack. "You aren't, are you?"

"No, I wasn't." Jack shook his head. "But, it's not my story to tell."

"I will find out his past and I would rather not put Will through the trauma of asking him. It will help me better understand him."

"Hannibal, I have to admit I'm a little worried you're interested in him." Jack met Hannibal's intense stare with one of his own. "You're both... intense on your own. I don't know if I can handle your combined forces."

"This is not a moment for levity. I only want to help."

"I wasn't making a joke." Jack sighed and scratched at his chin. "Long story short, I feel responsible for his father's death. I consulted on a case. Prostitutes were turning up dead on the docks. His father fit the profile... a transient dock worker - the right age, gender, and race. We got a search warrant for his dump and it went as wrong as it could go... his dad was drunk and pulled a gun. An officer shot him. It was a justified shot, but his father didn't make it. Will was home when it went down and saw it all. He had just turned 11. He ended up in foster care and got lost in the system, even though I tried to keep track of him. A sensitive kid like him..."

More of the complex pieces fell into place and he could see more of the picture that was Will Graham.

"I see," Hannibal said. "And what of his mother?"

"Didn't want him. Abandoned him when he was a baby. He was a preemie and Will wasn't supposed to make it. She walked right out of the NICU after seeing him the first time hooked to all the wires and tubes. Never came back. She probably stayed away because of the guilt."

"It's no excuse."

"Doesn't matter either way now. She's deceased. When I say the kid is alone in the world, I mean it. He turned 18 and then foster care system chucked him out. He lived on a streets for a few years and I lost track of him." Jack fiddled with his glasses. One of his tells of nervousness. "He got picked up on a vagrancy charge last month and a friend of mine on the force gave me a call. I got the charges dropped, then got him a job at the university."

"Yes, about that. I checked his HR file. You got him hired under the inclusivity initiative. Really, Jack?"

"In this job market even janitorial jobs are competitive. It was the only way I could get him a job and quickly. Technically, he does have several diagnosed-"

"He's been labelled all of his life and you're simply reinforcing it."

"Don't give me your holier than thou bullshit, Hannibal. You don't know how hard it is to help someone who doesn't want it. I told him if he didn't take the job, that I would let them charge him."

"So, you blackmailed him."

"An ugly label-"

"For the truth."

Jack glared at Hannibal. "Once he figured out he had free access to books, he settled in just fine. It's been three weeks and he hasn't been fired."

"He's surviving, not thriving, Jack."

"You barely tolerate students, why the sudden interest in Will?"

"He has an exceptional mind," Hannibal said the truth. "So much unfulfilled potential."

"He doesn't like being told what to do," Jack warned.

Hannibal fought the urge to smirk. At least not by you.

"We've come to a private agreement," Hannibal told Jack. "I fully intend Will to become his true self."

Jack's shoulders slumped. "Maybe you can reach him where I couldn't."

Hannibal wouldn't tell Jack about Will's homelessness. Jack clearly didn't know and to tell him would be viewed as a betrayal by Will.

"I shall take care of him, Jack," Hannibal said. "That I promise you and I always keep my promises."

Chapter 5

Hannibal enjoyed watching Will, especially when the young man didn't know he was being watched. The awkwardness he displayed in social situations melted away, replaced by a natural grace. A display for Hannibal's enjoyment.

Hannibal smelt the another person coming towards Will before he heard their footsteps on the tiles. Hannibal kept out of sight, but carefully tracked the person who stalked after Will. A non-threat for now.

"Will..." A booming voice echoed in the hall.

Will continued mopping the floor and kept his head down. His ear buds connected to nothing were tucked into his ears - a false shield.

The footsteps stopped. "Will!"

Will winced and his shoulders slumped. Hannibal took notice of Will's tenacity to continue the pretence. Stubbornness or fortitude, maybe both. Both interesting traits that would need to be explored further.

"I know you can hear me," the voice demanded immediate attention.

Will kept his gaze down cast, but sighed. "Good evening, Dr. Crawford."

Even after a few days acquaintance with Hannibal, Will had learned manners could be another form of self-defence. Insults wrapped with social niceties. He was quick learner. Though Hannibal was sure Will still preferred bluntness to throw people off.

"Will..." Jack's tone was admonishing and Hannibal had to restrain himself to keep hidden.

"Jack," Will mumbled.

"That's better. We've been over this. There's no need for formalities between us."

"You've been over this. You talked, I listened." Will's fingers tightened subtly on the mop handle.

"How are you settling in? Have you made friends?"

"I've met people."

An evasive answer. Not the truth, but not quite a lie either. Will couldn't be bothered to socialize with the students.

"I well aware of who've you met," Jack said. "You never showed any interest in my discipline before, so why Dr. Lecter?"

Jack was jealous. His metaphorical hackles were rising.

"I don't have to justify anything," Will said.

Hannibal appreciated that even early on in their acquaintance that Will was exhibiting signs of loyalty. It was defiantly promising and would need to be fostered.

Jack chin came up and he looked down at Will. "Don't forget you're here at my discretion. I vouched for you."

"And here I thought it was for my shining personality. I need to finish mopping the floor."

"We both know you're above this job, Will," Jack said. "I've put off this conversation long enough."

"Says you," Will muttered.

"Will," Jack warned.

"I'm not above good, honest work. If I'm going to do it, I'm going to do a good job."

"You could do a good job at so much more. You've been here nearly a month and you've gotten a taste of campus life."

"You mean all the co-eds looking down at me? Or, being questioned by the campus cops? My favourite is being referred to as Dr. Crawford's pet project. About what a good, caring man Dr. Crawford is. How appreciative I must be for this opportunity. Oh yeah, it's been a blast."

"I've left you alone, but it's time we stop bullshitting around. You need to finish high school and enrol in college. Your gift-"

"No. Don't start on that crap that you've got a job waiting for me. What if, what if, what if. You've got a career path all picked out for me that I'm not qualified for and don't want. If I went back to school, I might do a technical diploma... maybe something to help animals, or a become mechanic, even-"

"It's all beneath you."

"Or, fix boat motors." Will raised his head and met Jack's gaze straight on. "My dad fixed boat motors. It wasn't beneath him."

"You're not your father."

"I know. I'm alive."

"Will, I'm sorry. This isn't going how I planned. I just want what's best for you. That's all I ever wanted."

"What's best for me is you can leave me alone. Thanks for the job, but-"

"I could do more to help you if you let me. We have a spare room at home. My wife wouldn't mind the company and-"

"Interrupting is rude," Will said.

Hannibal delighted in the chill tone of Will's voice.

"Funny how you suddenly room for me in your life. You didn't then. You didn't when they threw me to the wolves."

"Will, it's not that simple. It was complicated..."

"I'm an adult now," Will said. "Make me understand."

"You looked at me liked I personally pulled the trigger," Jack told him.

"It was your profile. Your profile never accounted for me, did it?"

Jack shook his head. "No, it didn't."

"So, it was about you. Your guilt. You don't know what I went through. I was different and no one wanted me. My dad wasn't a saint, but at least he never..." Will's words choked up. "It doesn't matter. I don't blame you for what happened, but I don't want to play your games now to alleviate your guilt. Thanks for the job. The rest I'll figure out... on my own, just like I always have."

"Will, please..."

"Dr. Crawford, thank you for the enlightening conversation. I'd rather not get fired, but I suppose the 'special' janitor would get some leeway. Thank you for that, by the way. There's nothing like being pitied by your supervisor. She talks to me extra slow, the patronizing bitch."

"Will, you don't understand-"

"Really, Jack?" Will hissed. "More than anyone I have no choice, but to 'get' it! You couldn't face raising a poor white trash kid who was broken. I was too broken for you to fix and you couldn't look at me without feeling guilty... without remembering your mistake. You couldn't protect me, but don't you worry, Jack. I learned how to protect myself."

"I... I know what happened in Baton Rouge after you ran away."

"It was self-defence," Will snapped. "Don't forget I have a sealed juvenile record. I've kept my nose clean except for that trumped up vacancy charge."

A tea cup already shattered and functioning. Hannibal wanted and needed to learn more.

"No one here knows," Jack said.

"Good and I'd like to keep it that way. This floor isn't going to mop itself.
Good night, Dr. Crawford."

Chapter 6

Will was wearing a hoodie blazoned with the university's logo on the front. It was horrendous. Gaudy and cheap. But mostly it was offensive to Hannibal because it was mundane. Will was anything but mundane.

Hannibal quickly noted a faded staining on the side. The item was likely discarded by a student and rescued by Will. The cuffs of his jeans were frayed and the knee thread bare. Some of the people paid hundreds of dollars for such a distressed look, but Will's was the genuine article.

Hannibal couldn't wait for the day he could dress Will in proper attire. Clothing properly tailored to accentuate his lean frame and compliment his eye colour. Hopefully, it would be sooner rather than later.

The hood was drawn up, hiding his face as he slumped against the wall and his hand tucked into the front pocket.

"You're late," Will said without moving.

Hannibal nodded. "Unpreventable, I'm afraid."

"It's rude," Will said and pushed back the hoodie. He was smirking.

"Impertinent boy."

"Good morning to you, Dr. Lecter."

"Morning. Whether it is good or not is debatable."

Will hummed his agreement. "If you were any longer, I was going to coming looking for you."

"Worried?"

"Me? No. But, your students are working themselves up into a frenzy. Each theory is more absurd than the last. Apparently, you're having an affair with one of your colleagues. Someone named Dr. Bloom has the most bets. Classic Group Think."

"You've been reading," Hannibal said, his tone both approving and amused.

Will shrugged. "I've got nothing better to do. So, are you?"

"Having an affair with a colleague? Your opinion?"

"I think that instead of a wall of shame, you just came from a committee meeting that you hate. Something trivial that Jack made you do. They probably called you in early and they all

are donuts, drinking bad coffee and generally insulting your supreme taste. You're tense after committee meeting."

"Very insightful, Will. And, in this case, true, and even more malevolent
- an ad hoc committee. There wasn't even a single scone or croissant in sight."

Will mock gasped. "The horror."

Hannibal laughed. "You are-"

"A shit?"

"Language," Hannibal corrected automatically. "You are... amusing."

"That's not much better."

"I beg to differ. I don't find much in this life amusing, Will."

"I'm keeping you. I don't mean, too."

"Let my undergrads simmer. Let their tongues waggle. You are much more interesting to talk to."

"They pay for the honour of being berated by you. I'm just a charity case."

"I thought I said no self-deprecation," Hannibal admonished.

"Sorry, I don't understand such big words..."

"You are extra cheeky this morning. See, amusing."

"I aim to please," Will said. The blush was back. The words were said in jest, but they were telling. "Your students..."

"One of them is plagiarizing," Hannibal said and motioned towards the lecture hall. With a quick check to see that the hallway was still deserted, he stepped in close to invade Will's personal space. "At the end of class, tell me who."

He lingered close - too close and sniffed.

"Did you just... smell me?"

Hannibal half-smiled and turned on his heel to head into class. Just as Will had told him, Hannibal could smell the stench of fear emanating from his students.

"My apologies, ladies and gentlemen, for my tardiness," Hannibal greeted them. "Discussions will have to be extra concise this morning as we have lost ground to make up."

Will came in a few minutes later. Undoubtedly, he was smart enough to give enough time between their entrances to stop people from making connections. Another test passed. For all Jack said Will was incapable of reading social cues, Will was proving him wrong.

Hannibal put his students through their theoretical paces, causing stress levels to spike even higher than normal. The smell was satisfying. Will watched all of it from the back.

"You're dismissed."

They fled en masse like sheep from a wolf. All except Will who stood at the back of the lecture. He waited until the last student scampered away before he slowly descended the lecture hall steps. He kept walking slowly until he was standing directly in front of Hannibal who was glancing down from the platform.

"Third row on your left. Five seats in. The one with the ugly ass blue polo shirt with little boats on it," Will said. "It's him."

Hannibal merely raised his eyebrow.

"We both know I'm right," Will added. "He's also cheating on his girlfriend and he's developing a drinking problem. Too much pressure from his... my parents. My old man's an ass. They want me to be a lawyer, but I just want to party. It's so much pressure being a legacy. They expect too much from old money. They want me to be like my big brother, but I'm not like Junior. I'm never good enough. I can't keep up so, so I cheated."

Hannibal kept watching Will. Will licked his bottom lip, his eyes glassy. He blinked, coming slowly back.

"I take it by this little test that you know about what a freak show I am. I thought you were different."

"Oh, Will," Hannibal purred and stepped down until he was standing in front of Will. "You have no idea how very different I am. I am very different than all the rest."

Will was staring at the ground. "I was hoping you wouldn't find out."

He reached out ran fingertips allow Will's cheek. He delighted in Will's shiver. Hannibal stepped closer until his lips were hovering near Will's ear and he whispered, "There will be no hiding from me. I see you."

"Hannibal..." Will's tone was broken.

"Not here, not now," Hannibal told him. "You will meet me in parking lot B and come home with me for lunch. There will be no arguments. Nod if you understand me."

Will nodded.

Hannibal reached out and gripped Will's left wrist quickly. "You will not run. If you do, I will find you."

Hannibal noted that Will shuddered again, but didn't pull away from him. Rather, he swayed slightly towards Hannibal.

"You will also not get wrapped into self-pity and I will not abide you calling yourself a freak show or any such non-sense. Lot B," Hannibal said and rubbed his thumb over Will's pulse point. "You have 15 minutes. I drive a midnight blue Bentley."

He stepped away and turned his back on the young man.

Hannibal's hand was on the door knob when he heard Will call out, "Was I right?"

"We will talk about how very remarkable you are very shortly, William."

Chapter 7

When Hannibal came to the parking lot, Will was waiting for him. Not right beside the Bentley, but leaning against the nearby chain link fence. To the rest of the world, Will looked like a student waiting for his car pool or parent to pick him up. Will never betrayed the nerves bubbling beneath the surface.

Hannibal was pleased Will had an instinctual understanding and ability to blend in. It would be useful and solid foundation for his end-game. When Hannibal nodded minutely in his direction, Will pushed off the wall and walked slowly over to the car.

When he was closer, Will said in a low tone, "Would you prefer I meet you off campus?"

"While clandestine is an option, to do so would be an attempt to avoid suspicion," Hannibal responded. "But, we have nothing to hide, do we, Will?"

Will shook his head. His gaze was fixed downwards. Hannibal would have to work on his confidence. When selling any lie, the first step was projected confidence.

"I'm not ashamed to be seen with you," Hannibal told him. "Unless you're ashamed to be seen with me?"

Will scoffed, with a blurted out half-laughed. His posture straightened out and he dared to glance up now.

"I take that is a no, so please get in. Though I do have tinted windows to protect your dignity and there's no one around to witness your fall from grace."

"I fell from grace a long time ago. Nice wheels."

Hannibal got behind the driver's seat and closed the door. Will brushed off his pants before he got into the vehicle.

"I'm sorry if I get your car dirty," Will said. He closed the door and wiped his hands on his jeans. "I see the seats are leather. I mean, obviously they are leather. It cleans well."

"You'd be surprised the kinds of stains you can get out leather," Hannibal said and started the car.

His entertainment system started, picking up on a crescendo of one of his favourite Italian pieces. As the soprano's beautiful voice picked up more power, the stress from Will's shoulders began to relax. He probably had been exposed to only atrocious music and Hannibal had every intention to correct that.

"Seat belt, please," Hannibal said and clicked his own into place.

Will did as he was told. His eyes closed and his head thumped back on the headrest. "So, I'm here."

"So, you are. Let's just avoid the whole scenario where I tell you that I will prepare you a meal and you try to decline for whatever reason," Hannibal said. "I will cook. You will eat. We will have delightful, engaging conversation. I will send you home with copious amounts of leftovers for you and your canine. Any other scenario will be entirely unacceptable."

"Yeah, okay. I mean, yes, Thanks... Thank you. I'd ask how you know I had a dog, but I'm sure you smelt her," Will said and cracked his left eyelid open. "I like your cooking."

"And, your enjoyment of my food brings me joy."

The rest of the drive to Hannibal's home was made in silence. Hannibal parked and Will followed him into the foyer.

Will's gaze took in his surroundings and noticed that Hannibal had turned the deadbolt. "Welcome to my home, Will."

"Do you live alone?"

"I do."

Will glanced up, meeting his gaze straight on. "I don't want to do the dance. Not now. You're too good to be true, Doctor Lecter. We're alone now, so you tell me what do you really want from me?"

"What do you think?" Hannibal asked.

"I know that you don't really want to spend time with me."

"Says who? Because it certainly wasn't I."

"Me. It doesn't make sense why a man like you would."

"I'm afraid I am more than I appear, Will," Hannibal said. "My intentions are complex."

"There has to be strings attached. There are always strings attached."

"I have always been honest with you," Hannibal said. "I never said there weren't strings attached, only the nature of them is negotiable."

"You're nice and polite. Too nice and too polite."

Hannibal cocked his head to the side. "Your perceptions."

"It's not the real you," Will insisted. He waved his hand at Hannibal and then around the room. "None of this is the real you. It's a... show. A comfort."

Clever, dangerous boy. His eyes were distant as he slipped into his empathy.

"Not to you, to everyone else," Will whispered. "You enjoy the trappings, but it makes everyone else comfortable. They don't see the real you."

Hannibal closed the short distance between them. "What do you see, William?"

Will blinked. He licked his bottom lip. "You. Or, at least a glimpse."

"Are you afraid?"

"No," Will said. "But, I should be."

Hannibal flashed him a grin. "Do you want to run?"

Will shook his head. "I should."

"You should, but you won't. Why? Because, I also see the real you, Will. I know what you want more than anything else and I can give it to you."

"What?" Will challenged. "Jack said the same thing. I don't even know what I want. I'm a drop-out loser with a dead-end job. Jack wants to turn me into his egghead lapdog."

"You are, dare I say, more suited to the role of attack dog."

Will's gaze held heat and a challenge. The young man was expecting a sexual advance. "But still on a leash."

"I know what you want," Hannibal repeated.

"What?"

Hannibal leaned in until his lips were brushing against Will's ears. "To belong," Hannibal whispered. "A family."

Hannibal had caught him off guard. A shaky breath escaped Will's lips.

"I can give that to you," Hannibal promised. "That, and more."

Will shivered. "What's the price?"

"You," Hannibal said.

Will nodded and he started to pull the hem of his t-shirt up. Hannibal stayed his hand by wrapping his hand firmly around Will's wrist.

"No," Hannibal commanded. "What I demand is loyalty and trust."

"But-"

Will seemed to be equal parts hurt and relieved at the rejection. Hannibal loosened his grip, but brought Will's wrist to his lips, gently kissing his pulse point.

"There are many ways to belong," Hannibal whispered. "That is a promise. Such things must be earned, my dear boy."

"By you or me?"

Hannibal's answer was a sly grin.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!